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# **International Organizations, NGOs, and Police Implementation of Domestic Violence Policies in Liberia and Nicaragua<sup>1</sup>**

Peace A. Medie, University of Ghana

Shannon Drysdale Walsh, University of Minnesota

## **Abstract**

Domestic violence is the predominant form of violence against women in most countries in Africa and Latin America. Scholars have theorized the adoption of domestic violence laws and policies in both regions. However, policy implementation is understudied and under-theorized. Therefore, we compare how external actors — international and women’s organizations— have influenced police officers’ implementation of domestic violence policies in Liberia and Nicaragua. We propose the *Transnational Implementation Process* (TIP) to describe how external actors have employed training, institutional and policy restructuring, and monitoring, to influence police behavior at the street-level. The effects of these strategies have been conditional on the political environment. We identify two patterns of external influence on street-level implementation: internationally-led and domestically-supported implementation in Liberia, with domestically-led and internationally-supported implementation in Nicaragua.

## **Introduction**

Transnational activism by women’s organizations placed violence against women (VAW) on the agenda of the UN and other international organizations (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Walsh 2016b). Since then, global, regional, and sub-regional organizations have mainstreamed VAW into their programming and have influenced states to develop laws, policies,

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<sup>1</sup> Authors are listed in alphabetical order; both contributed equally to the authorship of this article.

institutions, and programs to address domestic violence and other forms of VAW.<sup>1</sup> They have also built the capacity of women's organizations and supported them with funds to develop and implement a variety of programs in this area.

Women's organizations and international organizations have argued that these initiatives are necessary because the police have typically failed to deal adequately with domestic violence (Jubb et al. 2008, Jubb et al. 2010). Studies from across the globe show that despite major improvements in some countries, the police have tended to trivialize domestic violence and to exhibit many of the gender biases found in the wider society (UN General Assembly 2012; UN Women 2011). In Africa and Latin America, this has often resulted in a failure to record women's complaints and to investigate or arrest the accused. These biases have also led to police re-victimization of women who have been battered (Medie 2019; Walsh and Menjívar 2016, Walsh 2016a). This re-victimization has severe physical and psycho-social implications for women. It often results in women returning to the same abuse from which they sought protection. Additionally, the lack of appropriate policing further empowers abusers who realize they will not be held accountable, leaving survivors more vulnerable to retaliation and heightened violence. In Central America, systemic policing failures have also caused women to flee and seek asylum elsewhere, even though many are then deported back to the home countries that failed to protect them in the first place (Menjívar and Walsh 2017).

Consequently, the United Nations and women's organizations, through international instruments such as the Declaration of Violence against Women (DEVAW), have sought to promote new domestic violence norms. They have advocated for the adoption of domestic violence laws and policies, and for the creation of specialized institutions and programs, which are meant to correct weaknesses in police responses to female victims. Subsequently, legal and institutional measures have been adopted in most countries throughout Africa and

Latin America. However, with a few exceptions, the gender and politics literature is mostly silent on how these international and domestic actors have affected street-level behavior of the police in these settings. Street-level bureaucrats, such as police officers, are civil servants that have direct contact with the general public. They function as policy decision-makers. Policies are not static, but rather are continually being made through agency regulations and street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1980). These powerful political agents have the latitude to make decisions that impact implementation, and their street-level behavior can enforce or undermine written policies. Thus, their near-absence from the literature constitutes a major knowledge gap.

We address this gap by advancing a typology of the implementation process that involves external actors at the international and domestic levels. These processes differ from and extend upon those that have been proposed to explain policy adoption and implementation (Montoya 2009), and contribute to building a theoretical framework for explaining street-level implementation in developing countries. We draw on over 350 interviews conducted in Liberia and Nicaragua to compare how international organizations and women's organizations in both countries influenced implementation by street-level actors, namely police officers. We focus on two indicators of improved street-level performance in the implementation of VAW policies: 1) the reduction in practices that re-victimize survivors who report domestic violence in Liberia and Nicaragua and 2) the referral of cases to courts in Liberia. We argue that external actors (international and women's organizations) employed training, institutional and policy restructuring, and monitoring of the police to influence street-level policing and that their involvement was crucial for improving police responsiveness to domestic violence. We show how international and domestic organizations, through *Transnational Implementation Processes* (TIPs), have contributed to a reduction in re-victimizing practices and contributed to an increase in the rate of referral of

domestic violence cases for prosecution. We also demonstrate that the TIP is not linear, as exemplified by the recent reversal of implementation measures in Nicaragua.

This comparison of Liberia and Nicaragua demonstrates that there is variation in the relative roles and influence of international organizations vs. domestic women's organizations across different contexts, but that both were key to improving police response to VAW in both countries. Liberia exemplifies an internationally-led and domestically-supported transnational implementation process, involving a United Nations (UN)-led reform of the police force. However, Liberia's strong women's movement also exerted pressure on the government and the UN to hold perpetrators of VAW, particularly sexual violence, accountable. The Liberian National Police (LNP) collaborated with the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to establish a specialized unit — the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) — of the police force. While UNMIL and LNP were at the forefront of the reform process, women's organizations also participated in the restructuring of the police force and in training and monitoring of police officers. Thus, Liberia is a case of an internationally-led and domestically-supported transnational implementation process.

Nicaragua exemplifies a domestically-led and internationally-supported transnational implementation process from the 1990s through 2017, when the women's police stations were constructed and operated. Domestic advocates proposed the idea of specialized policing for women, attracted funding from international cooperation agencies, and worked with these agencies and with the government to improve police responses to domestic violence. Domestic support from civil society has continued for women's policing in Nicaragua, but the shrinking of international donor support and disappearance of state support has contributed to the recent decline in implementation.

These findings advance the international relations and gender and politics literatures by specifying the mechanisms and pathways through which external actors, including

international organizations, influence street-level implementation in developing countries. The findings are also relevant for policy and practice. However, we are careful to note that profound weaknesses in police performance persist in both countries despite these improvements, and that advances are susceptible to reversal (Schia and de Carvalho 2009). For example, a lack of infrastructure and equipment in Liberia have led officers to take actions that undermine democratic and gender-sensitive policing (Medie 2015). Nicaragua recently reversed most of its advances in policing for women and is now utilizing government-supported security forces to arrest, torture, and even murder citizens protesting and opposing recent government policies (Amnesty International 2018). As of 2017, the women's police stations closed due to a lack of government support and declining international funding (Neumann 2018, Córdoba 2018). The increasing consolidation of the Ortega regime that began to close itself to external influence in 2008 was an early warning sign of what now is a national crisis for citizen security – and completely undermined previous policing advances for women.

We also recognize that the referral of cases to court does not always result in prosecution and that prosecution does not guarantee a deterrence. We also recognize that women, including many who report domestic violence to the police, often do not seek the arrest and prosecution of their partners (Medie 2015; Horn et al 2015; Hossain et al 2014). However, the referral of cases for prosecution is an important indicator of the seriousness with which the state and its officials judge the problem of domestic violence and a measure of their enforcement of the law.

In the next section, we review the literature on police responses to domestic violence in Africa and Latin America and highlight the commonalities and differences across these regions. We then review the scholarship on the implementation of VAW laws and explain that while there is an emerging literature showing that international actors shape

implementation, most of this work has not examined the relative roles of international vs. domestic actors, nor investigated their impacts on street-level behavior. We follow this with a discussion of the methodology and background for Liberia and Nicaragua. We then explain how external actors engage in transnational implementation processes that entail collaboration between international organizations and domestic women's organizations. Through our case studies, we demonstrate how the mechanisms of training, institutional and policy restructuring, and monitoring influence street-level behavior.

### **Police Responses to Domestic Violence**

Across Africa and Latin America, the police is one of the least trusted institutions (Gallup 2018; Bailey and Dammert 2006; Medie 2018). While there are marked differences across countries, this lack of trust is widespread. While exceptions exist, policing in Africa and Latin America has a history of placing the protection of the political elite above protection of and service to everyday citizens (Alemika 2009, Cruz 2006; Osse 2014; Tankebe 2011). Political leaders and elites have used the police force, and its resources, to suppress opponents in the populace and maintain their grip on power (Hills 2007). They have also diverted resources from responding to the populace's calls for help and from investigating, executing arrests, and referring cases to court. This prioritization of elite interests is an extension of colonial-era policing in Africa and Latin America, during which the role of the police was to protect the colonial establishment from the indigenous population (Alemika 2009; Tankebe 2013) and the landed oligarchy (Cruz 2006, Amaya 2006). In Latin America, the co-optation of police forces by elites was widespread during civil wars when dictatorships used police as agents of repression (e.g., the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua).

This politicization of the police is one of the reasons why policing in many countries falls below the standards of democratic policing (Ungar 2009). Bayley (2001) identifies four elements of democratic policing: police prioritization of the needs of individual citizens and

private groups; police accountability to the law, rather than the government in power; police protection of human rights; and transparency of police activities. This politicization of the force, combined with corruption and ineffectiveness at enforcing the law, has also contributed to distrust of the institution and to the persistence of undemocratic policing in most African and Latin American countries (Armah-Attoh et al. 2007; Medie 2018; Fruhling 2003). In surveys conducted in 2002 and 2005 in twelve African countries, 80% of respondents saw the police as the most corrupt of eleven government institutions (Armah-Attoh et al. 2007). Inadequate training and poor remuneration, as well as the lack of infrastructure, logistics, and equipment, also contribute to unethical practices in the force and to undemocratic policing in Africa (Medie 2018) and Latin America (Macaulay 2012). Thus, while there are indications that some police forces perform better than others, policing in these two regions has largely failed to meet the needs of the majority of the population. Female victims of violence are particularly underserved by the institution (Menjívar and Walsh 2017).

Despite some improvements, women are underrepresented within the police forces in Africa and Latin America (Gaanderse and Valasek 2011, Ortega 2018). In 2011, Liberia's police force was 15.42 percent women and Nicaragua's was 26 percent women (Kerr-Wilson et al. 2011). Even though Nicaragua has a comparatively high proportion of female officers, these are still male-dominated institutions. While the presence of female officers is not necessary for gender-sensitive policing and is no guarantee that the interests and well-being of women will be prioritized, their absence is a strong indicator of a failure to recognize that policing is gendered and of the seriousness that is attached to VAW. Indeed, the police in many African countries have been found to exhibit behaviors that lead to the re-victimization of victims of domestic violence and other forms of VAW and to ineffectiveness in handling their cases (Medie 2018, Jubb et al. 2010). While most complainants in domestic violence



cases do not want their partners to be prosecuted, they typically want an intervention to stop the violence (Horn et al. 2015; Author 2015, Hautzinger 2007). They also want to be treated with kindness and respect. However, reports suggest that this has typically not been the case in most non-specialized police stations in Africa and Latin America (Medie 2018; 2015; Jubb et al. 2010). The police have generally not viewed domestic violence as a serious offense and have often failed to record and investigate reports and to refer cases to court, even when this is the complainants' preference (UN General Assembly 2012; UN Women 2011).

Furthermore, gender norms that cut across societies worldwide have tended to blame women for this violence. This kind of treatment by police amounts to a re-victimization of survivors. In addition to leaving women vulnerable to the violence, it emboldens perpetrators who know that they will not be held accountable by the formal justice system

It is in response to the weaknesses and failures of the justice system to respond adequately to women victims that states have passed new laws, strengthened existing ones, and established specialized police stations. Pressure from and collaboration with international organizations and women's NGOs often led to the creation of these specialized laws and policing. Specialized policing has been promoted by the UN in Africa (Medie 2018; Medie 2019). Coordination between various international donors and domestic actors has diffused the model of specialized policing for women within Latin America (Jubb et al. 2008). In Africa, these specialized police stations have proliferated in post-war states such as Liberia. While they hold the potential to improve how survivors will be treated by the criminal justice system, the literature suggests caution in viewing specialized policing as a panacea in Latin America (Hautzinger 2007, MacDowell Santos 2005). However, where changes have been made, actors external to the state have often been crucial to these advances (Jubb et al. 2008). It is, therefore, important to understand how efforts by external actors have influenced policing in the area of domestic violence.

## **Literature on the Creation and Implementation of Domestic Violence Policies**

Scholarship on states' responses to VAW largely does not address street-level behavior, but does reveal that external actors are crucial for policy adoption, the creation of institutions, and institutional reforms. For example, Laurel Weldon's 2002 cross-national study measures countries' responsiveness — the degree and speed with which governments make seven advances that include legal reforms, funding for shelters and crisis centers, government training programs and initiatives, and the development of policy agencies and prevention strategies. She finds that external actors are important, as responsiveness improves with the presence of a strong, autonomous women's movement that reinforces state institutions. In a study of post-communist countries, Olga Avdeyeva (2007) conceptualizes implementation of VAW laws as the ratification of and compliance with human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). She finds that women's organizations and international organizations influenced implementation through coercion, persuasion, and acculturation. For example, women's organizations in Croatia and Slovenia shamed the government into developing police training programs and sponsoring shelters for battered women. In Kosovo, coercive strategies employed by the UN mission led to policy implementation by the government.

Celeste Montoya's (2013) cross-national analysis of the European Union measures the implementation of VAW laws by the extent of institutional reforms, including advances in protocols, regulations, and guidelines, as well as the development of a broad range of state agencies, programs, regulatory practices, training programs, and public awareness campaigns. She argues that a lack of local commitment and/or capacity are obstacles to implementation, and that external actors such as international organizations can help build capacity and women's networks. Montoya (2009) also notes that there are three types of policy reform processes: domestically-driven, transnationally-driven, and internationally-

driven. She argues that countries are more likely to implement VAW laws where reforms are domestically-driven, as they have the highest levels of commitment and capacity. While Liberia and Nicaragua do not fit into her framework of a transnationally-driven policy reform process,<sup>2</sup> they did exhibit transnational efforts to implement institutional reforms. We seek to understand how external actors have influenced street-level policing on domestic violence in Liberia and Nicaragua. Furthermore, we build on this literature by moving beyond the creation of institutions to study implementation at the street level.

### **Methodology and Sources of Data**

We are conducting a comparative analysis of Liberia and Nicaragua to identify the processes by which international and domestic actors impact street-level implementation of VAW laws. We are leveraging these cases as heuristic case studies (George and Bennett 2005, 74) in order to identify relevant new causal mechanisms and causal pathways for strengthening and weakening implementation. This draws on the “grounded theory” approach that generates theoretical insights through qualitative research (Glaser 1978, Strauss and Corbin 1994, 273-285). We engage in inductive theory-building, rather than theory-testing.

Both authors conducted extensive field research with the objective, among others, of understanding the factors that have shaped police responses to domestic violence and rape. In Africa, the first author conducted over 150 semi-structured interviews in Monrovia and Gbarnga in Liberia in 2010 and 2011. This included interviews with 50 police officers, other officials in the police and courts, UN officials, survivors of domestic violence, and women’s rights advocates, some of whom worked for women’s NGOs. In Central America, the second author conducted over 200 semi-structured interviews in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, including over 50 in Nicaragua over the course of 22 months from 2004-2014. Interviewees in Nicaragua within and outside the police stations included police officers, social workers, psychologists, lawyers, judges, state officials, bureaucrats, survivors of

domestic violence, journalists, and women's rights advocates, some of whom worked for domestic or international NGOs. Both authors also drew on secondary sources of data including newspapers and reports produced by the police and by international organizations. Data coding was guided by the literature. We sought to identify the explanatory variables that have been specified in the literature and the frequency of their occurrence in the interview data. However, we also sought to inductively identify explanations that are largely absent from the literature, as this is an area that is understudied.

### **The Case Studies: Domestic Violence and the Police in Liberia and Nicaragua**

While institutional reforms are an important part of implementation, we are focusing on the aim of these reforms, which is for state agents working in these institutions to be more responsive to women. In the case of policing, we conceptualize implementation as improved street-level performance. Two indicators of improved performance are reduction in the re-victimization of survivors and an increase in the rates of referral for prosecution. While we do not have quantitative measures of the first outcome, we draw on our interviews with police officers, women's rights advocates, government officials and officials of international agencies, and survivors of violence to assess police performance on this indicator.

We conceptualize the process of implementation for Liberia and Nicaragua as transnational, and generalizable to countries with shared characteristics. We argue that implementation is achieved through *transnational implementation processes* (TIPs) in which external actors (in this case, international organizations and domestic women's organizations) collaboratively engage in training, restructuring institutions and policies, and monitoring police behavior. External actors help overcome challenges to implementation in contexts where capacity is lacking. Liberia had an internationally-led and domestically-supported TIP, whereas Nicaragua had a TIP that was domestically-led and internationally-supported – reversed when the Ortega government consolidated power and closed itself to external

influence. While external actors have been necessary for implementation, their impact has also been dependent on the government being open to pressure and assistance from them.

***Liberia.*** Domestic violence, prosecuted as simple and aggravated assault, is the most prevalent form of VAW in Liberia and comprises the majority of VAW cases reported to the police. While there is no systematic study of VAW in pre-civil war Liberia, interviews with women's rights advocates suggest that this problem was prevalent in the country and rarely reported to the police (Medie 2012). Women's activism drew attention to widespread sexual violence committed by the warring factions during the country's 14-year (1989-2003) civil war (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004; Medie 2012). While domestic violence during Liberia's civil war has been understudied, research from the wars in Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, and elsewhere shows that domestic violence does not cease during wars (Okello and Hovil 2007; Hossain et al 2014). Furthermore, the end of a war does not end this violence that women face within the home (Medie 2015).

Liberia's most recent demographic and health survey shows that 33 percent of women had been subjected to physical violence by their partner in the previous year (LISGIS et al 2008). The types of violence they were subjected to include kicking, dragging, forced sex, and beating. About 1183 cases of domestic violence (simple and aggravated assault) were reported to the police in 2010 (Medie 2012). However, domestic violence in Liberia, like in most countries across the globe, is under-reported. A 2008- 2009 study across five of Liberia's fifteen counties revealed that only one percent of domestic violence cases was reported to a formal authority such as the police (Isser et al., 2009).

The majority of cases were resolved within informal institutions such as families or customary courts. The failure to report this offense to the police is partly influenced by Liberian's distrust of the police force and by the existence of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. The Liberia National Police (LNP) and the courts are two of the least trusted

institutions in the country (Medie 2018; Wambua 2015). This is not surprising because from its inception, the LNP has been politicized and has failed to conform to the principles of democratic policing (Akpan 1973). Political leaders have also used the force to silence the opposition and suppress dissent (Akpan 1973). Furthermore, the LNP did not recognize domestic violence as a category of crime before the war. This was reflected in how complainants were treated. Only the most grievous incidents were referred to court and there was the tendency to blame women for the violence (Medie 2015).

According to Deddeh Kwekwe, head of the Ministry of Gender and Development's (MoGD's) Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Unit (SGBV), "The police didn't know how to handle sexual and gender-based violence. If someone came to report domestic violence, the police would say, 'It's your fault you were beaten.' If a woman reported rape, the police would suggest she had caused it. They would make it worse, and women would be traumatized" (in Bacon 2012, p. 3). Given this lack of trust in the police and their ineffectiveness in helping victims, it is not surprising that most survivors preferred to resolve the case in informal dispute resolution forums. The LNP's Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), which was created in 2005, is the first mechanism of its kind in Liberia and sought to address these weaknesses. Its creation coincided with advocacy by a strong women's movement which pressured the transitional government to address VAW, particularly sexual violence, in the aftermath of the country's civil war. We, therefore, seek to understand how international actors, who collaborated with the government to establish the specialized section and women's organizations that called for improved police performance, have influenced street-level responses to domestic violence. We ask the same question in Nicaragua.

**Nicaragua.** Studies of Nicaragua indicate that there is widespread and persistent domestic violence, similar to Liberia. Leftist Sandinista revolutionaries overthrew a right-wing

dictatorship in 1979, followed by a decade of civil war between the revolutionary government and U.S.-funded “contras,” counter-revolutionaries. Sexual violence was widespread during the Nicaraguan civil war, though not to the extent that it was committed during wartime Liberia. In a 2006–2007 survey in Nicaragua, 48 percent of respondents who once had a partner (married or unmarried) reported that they had been a victim of verbal or psychological abuse (ENDESA 2006–2007). Furthermore, 27 percent reported that they had been subjected to physical abuse, and 13 percent reported sexual abuse by their partner or ex-partner (ENDESA 2006–2007, 29). Other surveys in Nicaragua report even higher levels of VAW, with 52 percent of ever-married women reported having experienced physical partner abuse at some point in their lives (Ellsberg et al. 2000).

The structure of policing has changed dramatically in Nicaragua in two periods: the first was the rise of the women’s police stations in the 1990s, followed by their initial decline in 2008 and closure in 2017. Before 1979, the police was used as a repressive apparatus of the state during the Somoza dictatorship (then, police were called the National Guard). After the 1979 Sandinista Revolution, the old Guard was replaced by new, primarily Sandinista, officers and restructured to focus on citizen-based policing. Even so, there were many cases of women reporting domestic abuse and being treated as if they deserved it. This made many women wary of the police providing public security.<sup>2</sup>

In protest to police mistreatment of victims, a movement emerged to create women’s police stations through a domestically-led and internationally-supported transnational implementation process. They formed alliances with women working in the police as well as international cooperation agencies from the Netherlands among others, to help fund and create specialized policing units to respond to victims of domestic violence (Córdoba 2018). Female police officers worked with women’s organizations to strengthen the response to

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous interview from Nicaragua. Interview conducted by the author on October 29, 2013.

domestic violence. This coalition attracted the attention of international donors by having a strong gender perspective on policing as well as the problem of VAW. International cooperation agencies collaborated with local advocates to create Nicaragua's first women's police station in 1993. In 2015, there were 162 such stations throughout the country, serving women and children and operated by female officers (Neumann 2018). This collaborative effort also strengthened street-level responses to domestic violence. The Nicaraguan WPSs was credited with helping the police gain legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the general public, as the police once placed second in an image ranking of Nicaraguan institutions (Bastick et al. 2007).

However, this period of collaboration between the state and non-state actors began to decline in 2008, a year after Daniel Ortega returned to the presidency (Córdoba 2018). Women's police stations began a de facto closure in 2009 when the Ortega government began to prohibit women's organizations from accompanying victims (Córdoba 2018). In 2014, President Ortega issued an executive order that weakened the Nicaraguan violence against women law (Law 779). Instead of directing victims to women's police stations with integrated services, police were instructed to direct women to newly created Family Councils that discourage women from advancing legal cases (Córdoba 2018).

During the period when women's police stations still operated, there were deficiencies within the police and the women's police stations – including a lack of funding and marginalization within the broader police force. These limitations and setbacks have been written about elsewhere (Walsh 2016a, Neumann 2018). The advances of the WPSs from the pre-women's police station era were still vast and demonstrates the impact of external actors' collaboration with the women's police stations on victim services. However, re-victimization is on the rise as a result of closing down the women's police stations in the context of the Ortega government closing the state to external influence and assistance. The section on



Nicaragua will examine the improvement during the period of women's police stations, and the initial reports of failing institutional performance since their closure.

### **External Involvement in the Implementation of the Assault Laws in Liberia**

Liberia exemplifies a transnational implementation process that was internationally-led and domestically-supported. Implementation was led by the UN, and strongly supported by the state and by women's organizations. We are operationalizing implementation as the performance of street-level police officers, focusing specifically on the reduction in the re-victimization of survivors and the referral of domestic violence cases to the courts. Officers of Liberia's Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the police force are tasked with receiving all forms of VAW. The WACPS was established in 2005 under a memorandum of understanding between the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the Liberia National Police (LNP) as response to widespread rape during and after the country's civil war. The Section was created as a part of the police reform process led by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) that began in 2004. The first cohort of WACPS officers graduated from the police academy in 2005 and the first unit became operational in September 2005. Within eight months, six units had been established across the country and by December 2008, there was one WACPS unit in each of Liberia's 15 counties.

External actors, particularly the UN, played a key role in the establishment of the WACPS. UN officials proposed the idea to the transitional government, which was under pressure from the country's strong women's movement to strengthen the police force so that it could better address the widespread sexual violence that persisted after the end of the country's civil war. The transitional government lacked the capacity to independently address the problem. The UN's proposal as well as its support was, therefore, key to the section's establishment. Some funding for the construction and renovation of police stations came from the Norwegian government, which funded the construction of district headquarters. However,

we argue that the impact of international actors is not limited to the establishment of the WACPS but also extends to the performance of officers in the section (Medie 2013).

Furthermore, domestic women's organizations also shaped how officers of the WACPS enforced the law on assault. These international and domestic actors have been able to influence street-level implementation through: 1) training, 2) institutional and policy restructuring, and 3) monitoring the performance of police officers.<sup>3</sup>

**Training:** UNMIL led the training of WACPS officers within the police academy. In addition to this training, the UN and international NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council also organized continuous development workshops in which officers were trained in how to address domestic violence and other forms of VAW. Women's organizations, often with funding from donors, also organized training sessions for police officers. These trainings were important because they helped police officers to understand that survivors of domestic violence should be treated with care and sensitivity. A female officer explained that the WACPS training had taught her to be motherly towards victims of domestic violence, to always protect them, and to make them feel safe.<sup>3</sup> Another female officer explained how the creation of the WACPS and the training changed practices in the LNP:

So the office we were using, when victims would come, we just used to put both of them [accused and complainant] there, suspect looking at victim, victim looking at suspect, all those things happened then. Because we had only one office at that time... When we had not gone through the training, we would ask the victim "Is this the guy who did this that to you?" then we would ask the suspect "Do you know this girl here, is that what you did to her, is what she is telling us true?" But when we went through the women and children protection training we learnt that the victim and suspect should not be in the same room while the investigation is ongoing.<sup>4</sup>

This training, provided mainly by the UN and complemented by some women's organizations, was reinforced by the section's policies.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview, Officer #6, Monrovia, 13 October 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Officer #12, Monrovia, June 2011.

***Institutional and Policy Restructuring:*** UNMIL led the restructuring of the police force to create the WACPS and along with women's organizations, shaped the section's policies. The section's first director, Vera Manly graduated from the police academy in 2005 and created four squads, including a domestic violence squad, within the WACPS. Her training, and that of other senior officials, by UNMIL, ensured that the sections' structure and policies were crafted by leaders who had been introduced to international norms on how to respond to domestic violence. Furthermore, UN Police (UNPOL) officers were embedded within the WACPS. Six UNPOL officers were stationed in the WACPS headquarters between "2005 and 2011 to provide on-the-job training and guidance" to their Liberian counterparts (Bacon 2012, p. 5). Their presence at the centre of the WACPS' decision-making structure ensured that they offered advice that shaped the section's domestic violence policy. Members of the National Gender-Based Violence Taskforce included various UN agencies and a women's NGO (Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, AFELL). Taskforce members participated in crafting the section's 2009 handbook: National Standard Operating Procedures for Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender Based Violence. This handbook was created to guide officers on how to handle cases of sexual and other forms of VAW, including domestic violence. The WACPS' structure and policies, combined with the training received by officers, influenced police behavior (Medie 2013). They signalled to officers that there could be repercussions for not referring cases to court, and encouraged many of them to avoid the withdrawal of cases (Medie 2015).

***Monitoring:*** External actors also monitored performance. Liberia's gender-based violence (GBV) taskforce, which was chaired by the Ministry of Gender and Development, consisted of NGOs and representatives of the Ministry of Justice, including the police. Taskforce meetings were held monthly in each county and were forums where NGOs reported on their programming. It was also a forum in which these organizations brought their concerns before

the police. They identified problems in policing within their respective communities and then charged the police representatives present to address these problems. Therefore, this was a forum where international and local organizations could demand accountability from the police in a mostly friendly environment. Members of staff of women's NGOs also explained that they sometimes accompanied women to the police station and followed up on cases (Medie 2012). When they were dissatisfied with the police response, they elevated their concerns to the central headquarters (Medie 2013).

UNPOL had a more systematic approach to monitoring. UNPOL officers visited police stations daily to review log books and to follow up on cases. Police officers interviewed reported that UNPOL officers generally focused on major cases such as rape and aggravated assault (domestic violence). They advised police officers on how to proceed with individual cases and monitored the progress of cases to ensure that the prescribed procedure was followed. Officer #36 summarized their interaction with the UN thus: "So then they (UNPOL) look at those cases they recommend what we should do, they help us in the process...let's say by helping us with their vehicles to do some follow up on cases."<sup>5</sup> This close working relationship with the UN encouraged and compelled officers to practice prescribed actions, such as referring cases to court and to avoid practices that re-victimized women.

***Street-Level Performance:*** Statistics provided by the WACPS showed that while the majority of simple assault cases were withdrawn, the majority of aggravated assault cases were referred to court. In 2009, the section received 994 cases of simple assault and 189 cases of aggravated assault. Of these numbers, 147 simple assault cases were referred to court and 653 withdrawn while 69 aggravated assault cases were referred to court and 56 withdrawn.<sup>4</sup> The remainder of the cases were pending. This difference between the responses to simple and

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<sup>5</sup> Interview, Male officer, Monrovia, 7 Oct 2010.

aggravated assault have been explained elsewhere (Medie 2015) but the percentage of referrals is a marked increase from what existed before the section's creation and before the civil war. While we recognize that there are limitations to using the rate of referral as a measure of improved performance, the referral and withdrawal of cases is a strong indicator of law enforcement officers' attitudes towards a crime and of the implementation of international domestic violence norms.

Interviews with staff members of women's NGOs and UN officials also showed that they had perceived a reduction in re-victimizing practices. For example, a staff member of a woman's NGO in Monrovia explained that with training, the practice of asking women questions that discouraged them from coming to the police had reduced.<sup>6</sup> A member of staff of an international NGO stated that with training and coordination, the police had begun sending survivors who needed psychosocial support to them.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, the UN led implementation and was supported by domestic women's organizations. However, the activities of both external actors were facilitated by the political environment in Liberia. The section was created about two years after the end of Liberia's civil war and during a period in which the UN was leading the mandated reform of the police force. The 14-year civil war had so devastated Liberia that the police force was practically non-existent and the transitional government was heavily reliant on the international community. This gave the UN access to the police force and its officers. Furthermore, due in part to pressure from international actors such as the UN and from the women's movement, the government recognized that it was important to strengthen police response to sexual

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<sup>6</sup> Interview A, Women's Organization 1, Monrovia, 2 February 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Interview B, International NGO 1, Monrovia, 12 August 2010.

violence and declared its commitment to addressing this problem. However, it is important to note that despite these improvements, the WACPS has been plagued by several problems.

Women's rights activists criticized the section for being ineffective, slow, and for perpetrating some unethical practices, such as colluding with the perpetrators of violence (Medie 2012). In 2015, the commissioner of police warned officers against "compromising" rape cases (allAfrica, 2015). Furthermore, the section is heavily under-resourced such that officers with good intentions struggle to perform their duties (Medie 2012). Informal institutions such as gender norms that discourage women and punish them for reporting domestic violence also affected police performance as women often sought to withdraw cases after filing a complaint (Medie 2015). At the same time, activists acknowledged that police performance had improved in comparison to the pre-war period (Medie 2012). The case study exemplifies an internationally driven but domestically-supported implementation process.

### **External Involvement in the Implementation of the Domestic Violence Law in Nicaragua**

Nicaragua exemplifies a transnational implementation process that was a domestically-led and externally-supported during the period of creation and operation of the women's police stations. The subsequent period that led to the closure of the women's police stations and weakening of implementation was preceded by the loss of domestic support within the state, a state that increasingly excluded domestic women's organizations and international organizations from involvement in policy making and implementation, and the decline of external support by international donors.

Women's Police Stations in Nicaragua were initially established as a direct result of advocacy networks at the local and international level trying to improve police performance after systematic police failures to respond appropriately to cases of domestic violence. Within

the police, female officers allied with local women's movement activists and their collaborative approach attracted the attention of international donors, which provided funding and other support. For example, international cooperation agencies provided airline tickets for local women's advocates to visit and observe police stations in South America, which later became institutional models for the first women's police stations in Nicaragua. Actors external to the state were also crucial for advancing the implementation of VAW laws through their involvement in training, shaping the institutional structure and policies within the police, and monitoring police performance. These efforts were more domestically-led in Nicaragua than in Liberia.

As in Liberia, external actors were also key to the 1993 establishment and subsequent expansion of the women's police stations. However, it was local women's movement advocates working with women police officers and female state functionaries that spearheaded these efforts, which were supported by international cooperation agencies. A Nicaraguan police officer notes that "We had the opportunity to create the women's police stations because there were women in the Supreme Court, in Congress, working as forensic specialists, and in the army. Many of them came from the women's movement."<sup>8</sup>

The Dutch Embassy initially provided funding to make the women's police stations possible, in spite of initial resistance especially from male state functionaries within and outside of the police (Jubb 2010, Walsh 2016a). Later, international cooperation agencies from Spain, Denmark, and the Netherlands, among others, provided a broad range of resources essential to maintaining and improving the performance of women's policing units. Resources from international sources have included funding for training, anti-violence campaigns, community meetings, and police vehicles.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Anonymous interview. Interview by author. Managua, Nicaragua. March 6, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous interviews with a police officer on March 12, 2008 and a worker with an international cooperation agency on March 31, 2008 in Managua, Nicaragua.

The nature of external actor involvement in policing has changed over time in Nicaragua. The first stages of external involvement in Nicaragua was transnational, as local grassroots efforts leveraged international donor support. Shortly after the creation of the first women's police stations in 1993, local women's organizations and the National Institute of Women worked on large-scale projects with international cooperation agencies, which provided technical assistance for the development of women's police stations. These projects ran through the 1990s until the end of their funding cycle in 2004. In general, the drive behind many international donor projects in Latin America has been to provide seed funding and technical assistance for incipient state institutions, in order for the state to later adopt responsibility for operations and institutional continuity.

After 2004, international cooperation agencies remained involved in ad hoc projects with the police, but not on the comprehensive scale that took place before 2004. By 2013, as the Latin American economy began to improve, international cooperation agencies scaled back operations or stopped working in Central American countries altogether. Many agencies shifted their focus toward projects to less developed countries (especially within Africa).<sup>10</sup> Due to the withdrawal of international cooperation agencies, external actors at the international and domestic level now have less of an influence on policing than in the past.

The waning of international involvement has left Nicaraguan women's movement advocates vulnerable to the political vagaries of the state. In 2014, the Ortega administration reformed and weakened the 2012 VAW law, and closed the WPSs in 2017 (Neumann 2018, Córdoba 2018). While these closures have not been officially decreed, domestic abuse cases are now routed to the Judicial Assistance Directorate of the National Police, a unit that lacks gender training (Córdoba 2018). In addition, the Nicaraguan government began violently

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<sup>10</sup> Anonymous interview with an individual working for an international donor agency. Phone interview on November 10, 2013. Managua, Nicaragua.



repressing protests against social security system reforms in April 2018. This has escalated into a national crisis, with a reported 322 people killed including 22 police officers – mostly at the hands of state agents – and 2000 injured as of September 18, 2018 (Amnesty International 2018).

Thus, in the description below for the impact of external actors on training, shaping institutional rules, and monitoring, we differentiate between two periods. The first period was one of strong external actor involvement that created the women's police stations and improved implementation vs. the more recent period with intermittent external actor involvement, WPS closures, and implementation setbacks in the midst of national crisis.

**Training:** In the early period of the women's police stations, international cooperation agencies provided most funding for training, which was conducted by local women's movement organizations and consultants who sometimes had a relationship with the women's movement. The involvement of women's civil society organizations in settings such as Nicaragua and Liberia can help build trust between the community and the police, in addition to bringing expertise to training (Bastick et al. 2007). In the 1990s, the police academy began to teach about gender values and VAW, followed by courses on gender and citizen security in the late 1990s (Bastick et al. 2007).

The WPSs also hired women's organizations to conduct courses on gender and VAW. During this first period, there was formal coordination between the women's movement and the police that ended with the completion of the comprehensive donor-led training in 2004. Since 2004, international donors have remained involved in training, but on a more ad hoc basis. Training on gender and VAW is provided not only for women's police station officers, but as a part of general police academy training as well. Police and international donors also conduct campaigns to raise consciousness of gender violence among citizens. This training

has promoted gender consciousness among police officers and campaigns have reportedly increased reporting by victims, as discussed by one police officer:

The police force in general is being trained to provide greater gender consciousness...When women come to the women's police stations it is because she has experienced a lot of violence. We are here so that she can break the silence, as the campaign says, and so that women can report it. After the "break the silence" campaign, there were many more reports then before.<sup>11</sup>

Since the closing of the women's police stations, it is reported that individuals without proper training working in the Judicial Assistance Directorate of the National Police are now addressing cases, in addition to Family Cabinet members outside the police.

***Institutional and Policy Restructuring:*** When women's police stations were established in 1993, Nicaraguan policing protocols were modified in tandem with the change to the institutional structure so that the women's police stations aimed to protect women in particular. There were no embedded officers like the UN officers in Liberia conducting internal training and/or monitoring. However, external actors were embedded in the WPS by design, and these included civilians that were social workers, psychologists, and sometimes lawyers who helped provide a comprehensive set of services within the WPS for victims. The WPS worked in partnership with civil society organizations to provide women with services (Bastick et al. 2007), including psychological and forensic services. These institutional reforms included the creation of an integrated model of attention for women, and resulted in improved treatment of women victims. An individual working in the women's police station describes the procedures in place for officers and other workers in the stations:

We work on all of this from a gender-based perspective with the backing of legal frameworks [interviewee names the applicable laws and international norms]. We work in coordination with different sectors in an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional manner. We work through a model of integral attention, where you have medical staff, forensic staff, legal assistance, psychological attention, social work, forensic attention, and police investigation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anonymous interview by author. Managua, Nicaragua. March 11, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous interview by author. Managua, Nicaragua. July 26, 2006.

Although the intervention of transnational advocacy network focusing on the issue of VAW has been necessary in order to *compensate* for a lack of state services, the networking itself made it possible to improve police performance for women.

With the post-2008 weakening and then closing of the women's police stations, this model of integral attention that was a significant advance in the provision of services for victims was dismantled and replaced with a more circuitous route for victims seeking assistance. In 2014, the Ortega administration issued a regulation that modified the 2012 VAW law (Law 779) so that female victims with less severe cases are obligated to report to the Sandinista political party-affiliated Family Councils before reporting to the police.<sup>13</sup> If they do advance to the police, victims are routed to the Judicial Assistance Directorate of the National Police – a non-specialized policing unit that lacks gender training. Marellyn Somarriba, women's advocate, notes that these new authorities tell women reporting violence that "family is important. 'Who is going to take care of your children?' they ask" and thus discourage victims from pursuing cases (Córdoba 2018).

**Monitoring:** In Nicaragua, monitoring does not take place directly from external actors. Rather, its signing on of regional and international human rights conventions obligates the state to periodically report its justice system progress toward compliance with these women's rights standards. For example, Nicaragua is required to report to the United Nations on its compliance with the Convention on the Elimination on all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It also reports to the Organization of American States on its compliance with the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará). While official reports are submitted by the state, women's organizations often submit "shadow reports" highlighting implementation gaps that may otherwise go unreported and the UN, and the UN and OAS

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<sup>13</sup> Anonymous interview by author. Managua, Nicaragua. August 12, 2014.

produce country-specific recommendations for improvements. In addition, the police had internal monitoring and accountability mechanisms, e.g., officers from the central office would resolve any issues that were reported in field offices.

The recent and stark shift in the political environment reduced the influence of international donors in Nicaragua – and consequently undermined the potentially positive impacts of monitoring on women’s policing. Since 2007, many international donors have withdrawn from Nicaragua and the Ortega government has become increasingly consolidated. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the government was invested in Nicaragua’s international image as a women-friendly country, and its adoption of policies on VAW was a means of demonstrating this commitment. However, the more recent Ortega government has become increasingly immune to external influence through increasing centralization.

Internationally-based monitoring has limited utility if the government does not value accountability to the international community. When this is compromised, countries are left with accountability to citizens (which depends on a well-functioning democracy) and to local NGOs (which depends on relationships of accountability with NGOs), and both of these have been increasingly strained with the Ortega government. Thus, the government has been increasingly unresponsive to external recommendations at the same time that external donor support and involvement has declined.

***Street-Level Performance:*** Even though police have been limited in terms of local capacity (sometimes, for example, not having a car or gasoline available for patrols), the women’s police stations made police much more responsive to women’s need for protection and intervention. Prior to the WPSs, the regular police often dissuaded women from pressing charges, either ignoring their complaints or even making them feel guilty about the violence perpetrated against them (Jubb et al. 2008, 30). Police officers were also known to turn victims away or instruct them to change their behavior in order to avoid violence (Walsh

2016a). The women's policing units that were created in reaction to this situation were a vast improvement over the status quo, even though they are problematic in many ways. A survey in the year 2000 revealed that the majority of women police officers were "respectful and attentive to the public, and they dealt well with people and were well prepared to resolve problems" (Bastick 2007, 151). Official statistics on referral rates are not available for Nicaragua. However, there was a sharp increase in reporting that indicates an increase in trust in the state among victims as well as more widespread availability of police services after the creation of the women's police stations (Ellsberg et al. 1997).

International actors, particularly international cooperation agencies based in Europe, have had an impact on street-level responses to domestic violence in Nicaragua. However, these international actors could not have done so (or been successful in their efforts) without coordinating with local women's organizations on the ground. For example, the women's movement, with the financial support of several international donors, constructed several women's clinics, including the IXCHEN Women's Center, ANFAM, and SIMujer. These Centers have performed auxiliary and essential services for victims, such as providing psychological services or post-rape examinations and health care. Prior to the creation of women's police stations, the problems in police responsiveness was similar to the ones in Liberia – victims were not taken seriously, were sent home to "make up" with their aggressors, in fact further disempowering women within abusive situations. These changes in Nicaragua made significant improvements for more gender sensitive street-level police performance.

However, the new political environment in which domestic external actors have been excluded, and international external actors have increasingly withdrawn, has already initiated setbacks in street-level police performance for women. The closing of women's police stations means increasing reliance on male officers who have not had the more extensive

specialized training of officers in women's policing units. Marellyn Somarriba, Nicaraguan women's advocate, reported that the Directorate of Judicial Assistance of the National Police now seeing cases "do not have gender violence training, the victim is blamed, and the investigative processes are extended." (quoted in Córdoba 2018). Somarriba notes ways that the police are now returning to ways of discouraging women from following through on cases. She has observed that authorities ask women if they are *sure* they want to follow through with the reporting process involving a psychological evaluation that many women are hesitant to have conducted. Instead of women getting support from integral services that were formerly provided by the police, Somarriba reports that abusers "can have a network of support and part of this support is in the Family Cabinets" (Córdoba 2018). Thus, it appears that the very institution that should be the first line of defense for women facing abuse is being used to support their abusers. These stark examples of failures to protect female victims demonstrate that implementation is not linear. Implementation advances are vulnerable to setbacks and even reversals when the domestic political environment and/or international support wanes.

## **Conclusion**

This comparative study of Liberia and Nicaragua shows two pathways through which external actors impact street-level implementation and the strategies they use. The case of Liberia is an example of an internationally-led and domestically-supported transnational implementation process. Conversely, the case of Nicaragua exemplifies a transnational implementation process that was domestically-led and internationally-supported. In Liberia, the UN collaborated with the government to create the WACPS, funded the construction of units across the country, and led the training of the section's officers. It also contributed to shaping the institution's structure and policies and to monitoring police performance. This suggests an internationally driven reform process. However, a deeper analysis of the political

context shows that there was also a strong women's movement pressuring the government to act. Organizations within the movement also participated in training and monitoring police officers and in structuring the WACPS' policies. The political environment in Liberia also facilitated the involvement of external actors (Medie 2013). Fourteen years of civil war had destroyed formal institutions, including the police force, and caused most personnel to flee. In the case of the police, its officers had been implicated in perpetrating atrocities against the civilian population. Thus, it lacked the capacity to perform basic functions during that initial post-war period. Therefore, the transitional government as well as the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had to work closely with the UN and women's organizations in implementing the country's domestic violence policies. These internationally-led and domestically-supported initiatives resulted in improved street-level performance.

In Nicaragua, the women's movement was in a strong position to take the lead with advocating for reforming police performance vis-à-vis women, but lacked the resources to do so. While there were pockets of support within the government to engage in gender-sensitive police reform, this support was not uniform. Local actors, external to the state, initiated reforms in close coordination with (almost exclusively) women allies within the state who cared about the issue. Domestic women advocates worked with international cooperation agencies, who made funding available for specialized women's police stations. International donors continued their support through involvement with further implementation efforts to advance training, changing institutional rules, and monitoring, which resulted in reduced re-victimization of victims seeking police services. Preceding the closure of the women's police stations, the opposite conditions held: disappearance of state support, exclusion of domestic civil society from the policy-making and implementation process, and the departure of international donors. Following the closures, initial reports demonstrate deteriorating street-level policing performance.

This paper makes an important contribution to the gender and politics and international relations literatures by showing that external actors can be crucial for policy implementation. It advances the literature on international norms, international organizations, and social movements by identifying the influence that international organizations and women's movement organizations have on the implementation of international human rights norms at the street-level. In both countries, we demonstrate that women's organizations in collaboration with the government and international organizations influenced street-level implementation. However, due to its role in creating the WACPS and in post-war reconstruction, the UN played a more prominent role in shaping street-level implementation in Liberia. This comparison demonstrates that both the levels of international and domestic involvement can vary within the implementation process and thus builds on the literature by identifying patterns of transnational implementation. It also illustrates that states are not always actors who resist international pressure or are reluctant to implement international norms. Thus, while states block implementation in some settings, they support implementation in others. Our cases show that the political context and external pressure and support were important in this regard.

Implementation is a challenge in many countries in Africa and Latin America; states are often unable or unwilling to implement policies. This unwillingness is particularly acute in the implementation of women's rights laws and policies because this is an area that is not seen as a priority in most countries. Gender norms have shaped this perception. They have also shaped formal and informal institutions. Indeed, in most African countries, women's ministries are underfunded, underscoring the need for external intervention in this area. This article has shown how external actors have intervened in and affected implementation. While holding perpetrators of domestic violence accountable is important, it is only one of many measures that are needed. Furthermore, many women do not want their partners to be



prosecuted. However, by showing how external actors influence implementation in this area, we have identified strategies and pathways that could have relevance for understanding and improving the implementation of other components of domestic violence policies, and of other women's rights policies.

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘domestic violence’ refers to intimate partner violence against women.

<sup>2</sup> Montoya’s transnationally-driven reform framework for policy change describes a process through which local actors trying to advocate for legal reforms experience a blockage when these reforms are proposed to the state, and then call upon international actors to pressure the state. This is similar to Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) boomerang model. However, this does not neatly apply to policy implementation in Liberia and Nicaragua, where there was not a blockage caused by an overall lack of political will. The state, as a site of contestation, was not uniformly opposed to these institutional changes. Obstacles to police reform were more in the form of a lack of local resources or capacity, and one important role of international organizations in these two countries was to help fund women’s policing units, which helped to overcome this lack of local resources. In part, these differences represent what is distinctive about policy reforms vs. institutional reforms: policy reforms only require overall political will (or, at least, a lack of resistance), whereas institutional reforms require some political will, but also financial resources or capacity. While Montoya mentions a lack of local capacity as an obstacle to implementation, this local capacity is not as relevant in countries where international cooperation or international organizations can help overcome a lack of local resources by externally funding new policing institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Medie (2013) discusses how international and domestic actors influenced street-level implementation of the rape law using these and other strategies.

<sup>4</sup> In the WACPS’ records, “domestic violence” was not limited to intimate partner violence but included all forms of violence within the home. Officers however explained that the majority of these cases were of intimate partner violence.